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United States
Department of
Agriculture

Animal and
Plant Health
Inspection
Service

Program Aid
No. 1553

Getting It Right

Importing and Exporting Agricultural Products



Cover photos: PPQ officers work at ports throughout the Nation, inspecting billions of dollars' worth of imported agricultural commodities.

PPQ inspectors examine commodities presented for importation, such as this papaya, to be sure that pests like the Mediterranean fruit fly have not infested the fruit. (These photographs and all others in this brochure were taken by APHIS photographer Laurie Smith.)

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As the world moves closer to the 21st century, nations have modified their ideas of protectionism and embraced such international trade agreements as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT). Countries have opened their doors a little wider to the prospects of new trade, particularly in the area of agriculture. With this increased interest in agricultural trade comes a bigger, more visible role for the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and some of its agencies.

Each day, USDA employees work at airports, maritime ports, farms, offices, and fields to ensure that healthy seeds, plants, bulbs, timber, flowers, vegetables, fruits, livestock, serums, and a multitude of other agricultural commodities can be imported and exported without risk to agricultural and natural resources. USDA works closely with foreign officials, scientists, farmers, and growers not only to facilitate the flow of this bountiful trade but also to forge new trade frontiers.



Importing Agricultural Products

Because agriculture in the United States is so bountiful, agricultural imports make up less than 10 percent of the total value of all imported goods. Despite this relatively low percentage of imports, the availability of foreign agricultural goods is still important to Americans. Without this trade, Americans would not be able to savor the sweet flavor of bananas from Ecuador or enjoy seeing the gawky ostriches from Africa in their zoos. These examples are just a couple of the multitude of riches Americans would be denied if foreign entrepreneurs never engaged in trade with the United States.

Plants and Plant Products

Of central importance to American consumers is the variety of plants and plant products from which to choose, whether grocery shopping, gardening, or conducting research in plant studies. In order to fulfill the ever-changing tastes and desires of Americans, the United States imports plants and plant products from around the globe. How-



Pests like this Asian gypsy moth hitchhike on imported foreign commodities and destroy U.S. agricultural and natural resources.

ever, some foreign countries have agricultural pests and diseases that do not exist in this country and that could cause devastating damage were they to be introduced here.

USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) is responsible for ensuring that healthy plants and plant products are being imported into the United States. Within APHIS, the Plant Protection and Quarantine (PPQ) staff inspects plants and plant products presented for importation for foreign pests and diseases before releasing them into U.S. trade markets. Because PPQ takes such great care to ensure that agricultural imports are healthy, Americans can continue to enjoy a diverse array of agricultural products for their dinner table, and local grocery stores can stock their shelves with everything from Mexican artichokes to Italian zucchini.

PPQ officers also advise importers on phytosanitary, or plant health, restrictions and provide information (including regulations, policies, and procedures) on agricultural commodities they want to import. For instance, if an importer wants to bring in a shipment of cut flowers from the Netherlands, PPQ officers provide the

importer with U.S. phytosanitary requirements in advance so the flowers can enter this country expeditiously.

Permit Information—Importers must procure import permits for many, but not all, plants and plant products before the goods begin their trip to the United States. Importers must also obtain phytosanitary certificates for all plants and some plant products from the exporting country. These certificates verify that the quarantine officials of the exporting country have examined the commodities for pests and diseases prior to the commodities' departure from the country, so pests like the Asian gypsy moth and diseases like chrysanthemum white rust are not introduced into U.S. agriculture. For some plants and plant products, no acceptable quarantine treatments have been proven to destroy pests and diseases of concern; these commodities are not allowed to be imported. Importers may obtain information or import permits by contacting

USDA—APHIS—PPQ

Permit Unit

4700 River Road, Unit 136

Riverdale, MD 20737-1236

Telephone (301) 734-8645

Telefax (301) 734-5786

Fax vault (301) 734-4327



PPQ inspectors carefully examine flowers presented for import, looking for pests and diseases. Inspectors also ensure that orchids like this are legally traded under the provisions of CITES.

PPQ's "fax vault"—an automated document retrieval system—enables requesters with (1) either a TouchTone™ telephone or a fax phone handset and (2) a fax machine or computer to receive copies of permits, factsheets, and other data. Much of the same information can be downloaded from the Internet at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/ppq>

CITES-Listed Plants—Many plants whose populations are threatened in the wild are protected by the Conven-

tion on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). The purpose of this treaty is to regulate the commercial trade of endangered and threatened species of wildlife, including plants, and monitor trade involving threatened species so that they do not become endangered.

PPQ enforces the plant import provisions of CITES and inspects plants and plant products presented for importation at any of its 15 designated CITES plant inspection stations located nationwide, or at other inspection ports approved by the U.S. Department of the Interior (USDI). In 1993, approximately 11.5 million protected plants were presented for clearance at PPQ's inspection stations. PPQ inspectors examine the CITES-listed plants to ensure that the plant specimens match the description of the accompanying CITES documents. If importers do not have the proper documents, PPQ officers seize the plants and offer them back to their country of origin at the country's expense. If the country of

origin does not claim the plants, PPQ works in conjunction with USDI's U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to place them in one of many designated rescue centers in this country, where they may be displayed for the public to enjoy.

Importers should contact the PPQ Permit Unit or FWS' Office of Management Authority if they have any questions about importing CITES-listed plants.

Genetically Engineered Material—

Just as the United States is making great strides in the fields of computer science and telecommunications, so too are U.S. researchers making futuristic advancements with genetically engineered plants and plant products to improve the quality of U.S. agriculture. To accomplish this research, many firms need to import plant material that has already been genetically altered. APHIS' Biotechnology and Scientific Services (BSS) staff within PPQ is a regulatory unit that plays a significant role in issuing permits for the



PPQ scientists compare a lush, red, genetically engineered tomato with two that have not been altered.

movement and release of genetically engineered plants and micro-organisms.

Before genetically engineered plants and micro-organisms are allowed to be imported, BSS scientists perform complete analyses to ensure that the material will not pose a significant risk to U.S. agriculture.

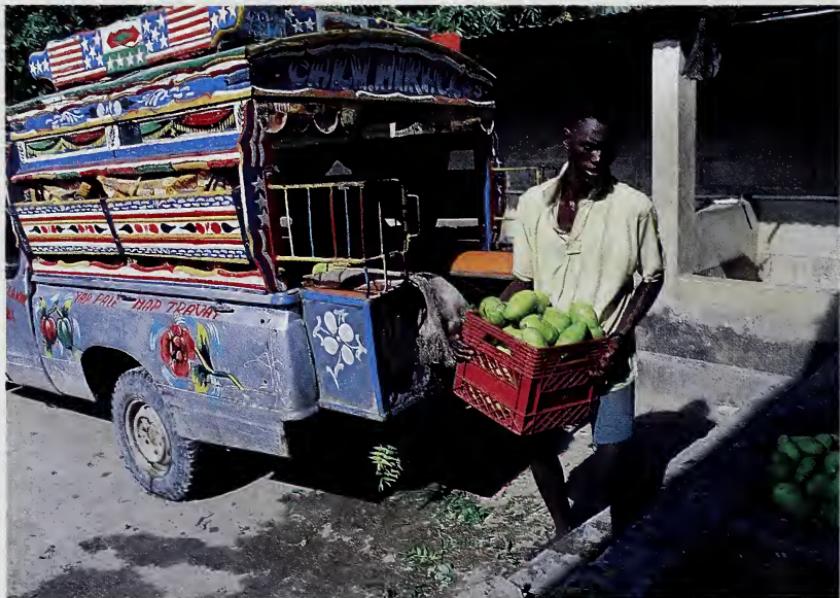
If BSS determines that the genetically engineered plants or micro-organisms being imported pose no significant threat to U.S. agriculture or natural resources, the staff will issue an importation permit. To apply for a permit or request more information, contact

USDA-APHIS-BSS
Biotechnology Evaluation
4700 River Road, Unit 147
Riverdale, MD 20737-1236
Telephone (301) 734-7612
Telefax (301) 734-8669

Those who have access to the Internet's World Wide Web can find out more about BSS activities by pointing their Web browser to <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/bbep/bp>. Under "Biotechnology Evaluation" there, users can examine relevant BSS regulations and track the progress of permit applications through an interactive data base.

Foreign Preclearance Programs—

USDA is also working to build bridges with foreign countries to bring new and healthy plants and plant products to the United States. APHIS' International Services (IS) staff is a vital link between U.S. markets and foreign businesses that want to trade in plants and plant products. When justified, IS officers work closely with foreign countries to set up preclearance programs for importing plants and plant products into the United States. Preclearance programs are essentially partnerships



IS officers work in Haiti and other foreign countries around the world preclearing agricultural commodities that are destined for U.S. markets.

between foreign businesses and APHIS, whereby IS officers work in foreign countries inspecting and clearing goods prior to their being shipped to the United States. These pre-clearance programs facilitate the smooth trade of agricultural products to U.S. markets and ensure that the products are pest and disease free before they touch U.S. shores.

One of the most successful of these preclearance programs is in Holland, where IS officers have been inspecting tulips, daffodils, and other flower bulbs since 1951. In Chile, IS officials have been inspecting all fruits and vegetables destined for U.S. consumers since 1981.

IS also has a team of officers who assess the pest and disease risk foreign agricultural commodities pose to U.S. agriculture and natural resources. If these officers determine that an agricultural product has a high volume potential and poses a pest risk that can best be addressed in the country of origin, IS will try to work with that country to establish a preclearance program or establish an area free from a specific pest.

Animals and Animal Products

American farmers, businesspeople, breeders, traders, equestrians, and animal-lovers alike all take a great interest in importing animals and animal products from around the world. With the different breeds of animals and the varieties of animal products that exist in foreign lands, importation of these creatures and commodities has become a lucrative business.

APHIS' Veterinary Services (VS) staff plays a vital role in this trade. VS officials regulate the importation of live animals, poultry, pet birds, and animal products, such as meats, cheeses, casein, gelatins, certain animal hides

and racks, and germ plasm—both semen and embryos. VS carefully monitors all of these commodities in case they are infected with foreign animal diseases, like avian influenza or foot-and-mouth disease, that could threaten U.S. livestock populations. For example, countries that have outbreaks of foot-and-mouth disease are not allowed to export fresh, chilled, or frozen meats to the United States. However, such meat products can be shipped into this country if they have been commercially heat processed or cured according to APHIS standards. VS establishes similar requirements for countries where other foreign animal diseases exist. Certain live animals, including pet birds, imported from foreign countries may have to be quarantined in USDA animal import centers located in Newburgh, NY, Miami, Key West, Honolulu, or Los Angeles before entering the United States.

Permit Information—VS issues permits for the importation of animals, birds, and animal products. For permit applications and information about import requirements and user fees, contact

USDA—APHIS—VS
National Center for Import/Export
4700 River Road, Unit 40
Riverdale, MD 20737-1231
Telephone (301) 734-3277
Telefax (301) 734-8226

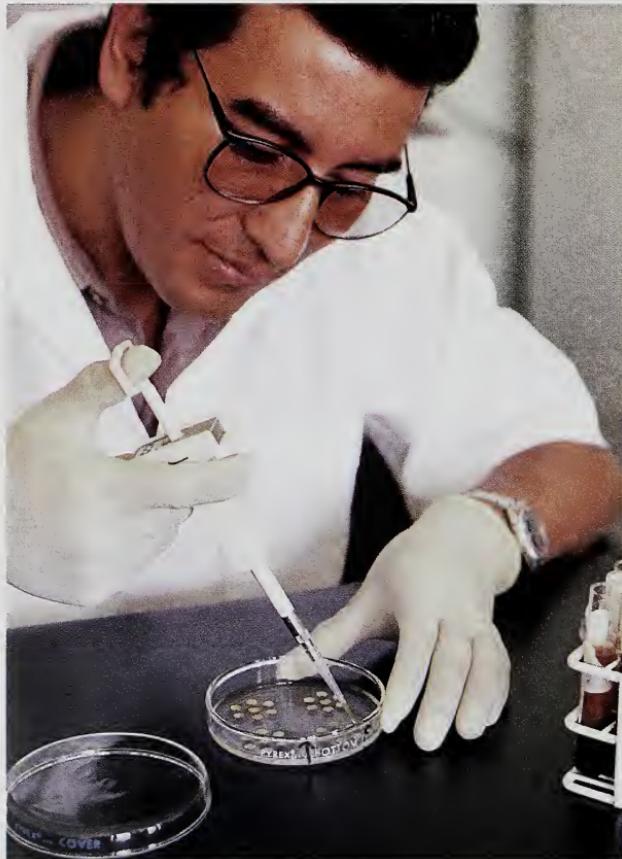
CITES-Listed Animals and Animal Products—Transported to this country from the jungles, seas, and forests around the globe are a multitude of animals and animal products that are protected by the CITES treaty. These creatures and wildlife products, like furs, Barbary apes, and python-leather handbags, arrive daily at America's ports, where they are inspected by

FWS officers. FWS wildlife inspectors determine whether or not the importation is legal and either release the cargo or take legal action against the importer.

For more information about importing CITES-listed animals, call FWS at (800) 358-2104. FWS is responsible for overseeing all aspects of CITES compliance within the United States.

Veterinary Biologics—APHIS' Center for Veterinary Biologics (CVB) staff within VS works closely with importers who are trading animal products.

CVB's licensing and policy development staff issues permits for the importation of veterinary biologics, such as vaccines, antiserums, diagnostic test kits, allergenic extracts, and immune stimulants. These permits are issued for research and development, transit shipment, and distribution and sale. To apply for a permit, contact USDA-APHIS-VS
Center for Veterinary Biologics
4700 River Road, Unit 148
Riverdale, MD 20737-1237
Telephone (301) 734-8245
Telefax (301) 734-8910



VS scientists ensure the safety, purity, potency, and efficacy of veterinary biologics by testing them for export and import.



The United States is by far the world's largest exporter of agricultural commodities, a fact that supports the saying that American farmers feed the world. Standing behind those farmers and growers is USDA, which facilitates the trade of those billions of dollars' worth of U.S. agricultural products that go from America's fields, forests, and farms to markets all over the world.

Plants and Plant Products

The exportation of plants and plant products accounts for a large part of the U.S. economy. APHIS works together with other USDA agencies to facilitate this trade. APHIS' PPQ staff closely watches over the exportation of plants and plant products to ensure that the United States is sending insect- and disease-free commodities to foreign lands. PPQ also expands markets for U.S. farmers and exporters by engaging in bilateral talks with foreign nations. For example, after several years of bilateral talks, PPQ recently reached agreement with Japanese officials who had previously prohibited the importation of such U.S. products as apples, cherries, nectarines, inshell peanuts, and walnuts. Convinced that USDA could mitigate any potential agricultural health threat and that the produce would be of high quality, Japan agreed to allow the importation of these products.

Providing Phytosanitary

Inspections—USDA applies the same standards to its exported plants and plant products that it requires of imported goods. APHIS' PPQ staff inspects many plants and plant products to

ensure that they are pest and disease free before they leave U.S. shores. PPQ aids American farmers and exporters in trading their commodities by providing phytosanitary inspection and certification for plants and plant products when foreign countries request documentation that the products have been examined. PPQ issues two kinds of phytosanitary certificates—those for domestic plants and plant products and those for foreign plants and plant products offered for reexport. The phytosanitary certification process has facilitated over 100 billion dollars' worth of trade over the last 5 years.

To help APHIS with the operating costs involved in conducting phytosanitary inspections and issuing the necessary certificates, Congress gave PPQ the authority to charge user fees for performing its inspection services. PPQ officers are required to collect that payment prior to issuance of the certificate. To obtain information or apply for phytosanitary inspection and certification, contact your local Federal or State plant regulatory office, or for general information contact

USDA-APHIS-PPQ

Export Unit, Phytosanitary Issues

Management Team

4700 River Road, Unit 140

Riverdale, MD 20737-1228

Telephone (301) 734-8537

Telefax (301) 734-3249

EXCERPT Program—Keeping track of the volumes of importation regulations for agricultural products in effect in countries around the globe can be difficult, not to mention time consuming.

Each year, the cooperative Federal-State export program issues certificates for roughly 260,000 shipments, and this number is expected to grow substantially as governments continue to eliminate trade barriers. To better assist exporters in targeting markets and defining what entry requirements a particular country might have for agricultural products, the PPQ staff, in cooperation with the State plant boards, developed a data base to list the phytosanitary requirements for each country. This data base, called EXCERPT, allows PPQ officers, State and county officials, and even industry members to access phytosanitary export information. So, if a U.S. exporter wanted to ship red oak logs with bark to Germany, information in the EXCERPT data base would explain that the logs need to be fumigated with methyl bromide and certified prior to being shipped.

The data base also lists the status of endangered plant species, commodities that are prohibited entry by specific countries and thus not eligible for certification, and any changes in other countries' entry requirements. EXCERPT identifies ports that are authorized to certify for export those endangered and threatened plants protected by CITES. For example, PPQ officials at San Francisco, a CITES-approved port, can certify cacti for export.

With the availability of such extensive export information, U.S. exporters usually do not run into any complications with trade. However, in cases where U.S. goods arrive at a foreign nation and are denied entry for plant health reasons, PPQ will try to negoti-

ate with foreign plant health authorities on behalf of the U.S. exporter.

CITES-Listed Plants—To help protect the world's threatened and endangered plant life from exploitative exporters, USDA became involved in monitoring the trade of such plants as saguaro cacti and exotic orchids. APHIS' PPQ staff enforces the plant export provisions of CITES and supplies exporters who are engaging in the commercial trade of CITES-listed plants with general permits. Exporters may obtain a general permit from PPQ by contacting the PPQ Permit Unit as listed in the import section of this publication.

Exporters of CITES-listed plants must also obtain CITES export permits or certificates from FWS. All FWS-issued CITES export permits for plants must be validated by PPQ at a designated port prior to export to help assure that the foreign country will accept shipment.

Animals and Animal Products

Across America's plains are millions of acres on which ranchers and farmers are producing prime-quality livestock and animal products to export to foreign lands. As USDA does for exporters of plant products, the Department also lends a hand to animal exporters. APHIS' VS staff works closely with exporters who engage in trade with foreign nations. In Fort Collins, CO, VS has a data base, the International Regulation Retrieval System (IRRS), that lists the animal health requirements of other countries. Both exporters and veterinarians can access this retrieval system if they have the necessary

computer equipment. For more information on IRRS, call (970) 490-7966.

For requirements on exporting animal products to foreign countries, exporters should contact their trading partners in the foreign country. VS will work with exporters to meet those requirements, both in examining the products and issuing certificates.

For permit applications and information about import and export requirements and user fees for animals, birds, and animal products, contact

USDA-APHIS-VS

National Center for Import/Export
4700 River Road, Unit 40
Riverdale, MD 20737-1231
Telephone (301) 734-3277
Telefax (301) 734-8226

CITES-Listed Animals and Animal Products—Animals and animal products, like plants and plant products, are protected by the CITES treaty. USDA works cooperatively with FWS in monitoring the trade of endangered and threatened animals and animal products. Although USDA does not regulate this trade, when PPQ officers discover illicit trade activities taking place, they inform FWS and work with FWS enforcement personnel.

The animal provisions of CITES are enforced by FWS, and that agency issues export permits for any animals, like parrots, alligators, and bobcats, that are protected by the treaty. To obtain an export permit from FWS for CITES-listed plants or animals, call (800) 358-2104 from telephones within the United States or Canada; from elsewhere, call (703) 358-2104. FWS charges a processing fee for these per-



VS inspectors examine U.S. livestock destined for export to ensure that our animals do not carry any diseases to foreign shores.

mits and requires that animals and plants be shipped out of designated ports.

For more information about FWS, contact

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Office of Management Authority
4401 N. Fairfax Drive, Room 430
Arlington, VA 22203

Veterinary Biologics Products—Just as researchers are working to improve the quality of agriculture in this country, so too are other nations pushing the boundaries of science in efforts to make healthier and stronger animals. APHIS' Center for Veterinary Biologics staff in VS works directly with the exportation of veterinary biologics. CVB has the licensing authority to issue permits for the exportation of veterinary biologics products that are sold in the United States. To apply for a permit, contact the CVB as listed previously.



VS inspectors examine and quarantine animals presented for import, such as these exotic parrots, to ensure that they are not transferring foreign diseases to U.S. agriculture.

Other USDA Agencies Involved in Imports and Exports

Agricultural Marketing Service

USDA's Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) offers a variety of services that support the expansion of export sales for U.S. agricultural products and help foreign exporters market their products in the United States. AMS plays an important role in enhancing international trade through its services of inspection, grading, certification, market information, market development, and commodity research and promotion.

AMS' role in the import and export of commodities centers around its customer-driven quality grading and certification programs. By grading and certifying agricultural products, AMS identifies whether or not these products meet certain standards and are eligible to be traded. Grading and certifying

also ensures that the seller meets contractual specifications that focus on product condition and quality. AMS grades everything from meat to grapefruit. Its inspectors examine products to ensure that they are of proper quality before they reach overseas markets, thus ensuring a better market price and product acceptance for U.S. exporters.

While only a few exported products are required to be graded, most products are graded to ensure that they will meet minimum quality requirements imposed by other countries. And some products are certified to ensure that private contract terms are met.

AMS also provides grading and certification services for many imported products. In some cases, grading of a particular commodity is necessary to meet minimum U.S. import require-

ments. However, for the most part, firms importing agricultural products into the United States voluntarily use grading services.

In addition to grading and certification, AMS' market news program provides timely information on prices, demand, movement, volume, and quality of agricultural products. Beyond traditional reporting of U.S. markets, AMS is now expanding its reporting from markets in Latin America, Canada, Europe, Japan, Oceania, and other countries of interest to U.S. importers and exporters. U.S. importers and exporters use these statistics to buy and sell agricultural products.

AMS participates in a number of international forums designed to facilitate world agricultural trade and avoid potential trade barriers. In particular, AMS' efforts have focused on international standards-setting organizations such as the Economic Commission for Europe, Codex Alimentarius, and the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

AMS also provides assistance to owners of small businesses in the United States who are interested in exporting agricultural products. AMS supplies these people with educational materials and videos that describe the best ways to get started in the export marketing business. The materials also cover tips on researching export markets, locating potential buyers, checking buyers' references, determining import requirements, dealing with problem shipments, and more.

For more information on AMS, contact

USDA-AMS
14th Street & Independence
Avenue, SW.
Room 3510, South Building
Washington, DC 20250-1000
Telephone (202) 720-8998
Telefax (202) 720-7135

Foreign Agricultural Service

Throughout the world, USDA's Foreign Agricultural Service (FAS) represents the interests of U.S. farmers and the U.S. food and agricultural sector through its global network of agricultural attachés. FAS collects, analyzes, and disseminates information about world agricultural supply and demand, trade trends, and emerging market opportunities. The analyses are used by farmers, exporters, policymakers, program administrators, and a multitude of other individuals around the globe. FAS officials use the analyses to prepare production forecasts and assess export marketing opportunities.

FAS also publishes commodity reports throughout the year to show the world picture of production, consumption, and trade flows of major crops and livestock.

FAS provides U.S. agricultural exporters with financing support through credit guarantee programs. These programs protect U.S. exporters or U.S. financial institutions against risk if the importer's foreign bank fails to make payment.

FAS also helps U.S. exporters develop and maintain markets for hundreds of food and agricultural products, ranging from bulk commodities to brand-name grocery items. FAS implements programs designed to build new markets and to maintain the competitive position of U.S. products in the global marketplace.

International trade policy experts within FAS help identify and work to reduce foreign trade barriers and practices that discourage the export of U.S. farm products.

In virtually every foreign market, U.S. agricultural exports are subject to import duties and nontariff trade restrictions. Trade information sent to the Washington headquarters from FAS personnel overseas is used to map

strategies for improving market access, pursuing U.S. rights under trade agreements, and developing programs and policies to make U.S. farm products more competitive.

FAS' import responsibilities include administering a dairy-import licensing system and imposing the tariff rate quota for sugar and sugar syrups. For more information about FAS, contact

USDA-FAS
14th Street & Independence Avenue, SW.
Room 5074, South Building
Washington, DC 20250-1000
Telephone (202) 720-7115
Telefax (202) 720-1727

Food Safety and Inspection Service

USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service (FSIS) is responsible for ensuring that meat products imported into this country are produced under standards equivalent to those of the United States for safety, wholesomeness, and labeling accuracy. Imported meat and poultry must originate in countries and plants approved to export to the United

States. FSIS inspectors monitor and randomly sample all incoming shipments to ensure that all food safety standards are met. FSIS also certifies U.S. meat and poultry products to meet the sanitary requirements of the importing countries. FSIS has authority over all products from cattle, sheep, swine, goats, horses, mules and other equines, chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese, and guineas. (This includes processed products containing more than 3 percent raw meat or more than 2 percent cooked poultry meat.)

For more information on FSIS, contact

USDA-FSIS
14th Street & Independence Avenue, SW.
Room 3510, South Building
Washington, DC 20250-1000
Telephone (202) 720-7943
Telefax (202) 720-1843



IS officers work with owners of foreign businesses on preclearance programs. These officers inspect agricultural commodities, like these Ecuadorean bananas, for pests and diseases.



USDA Facilitating Trade

USDA Facilitating Trade

With more and more countries engaging in bilateral talks to open the doors of trade, the prospects for agricultural importers and exporters are ever increasing. Working together to promote this pronounced flow of agricultural trade are USDA's agencies. Agencies such as APHIS, AMS, FAS, and FSIS are finding that they are not

only facilitating trade for American farmers and exporters and assisting foreign marketers but also striving to preserve and keep U.S. agriculture healthy. As we move into the next century, American consumers will look to USDA to continue its efforts to ensure that healthy agricultural commodities and products are available both in the United States and around the globe.

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